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An equal chance

Could sexual equality be the hot new recruiting tool? After decades of under-representation, things are looking up for women. A few key institutions and programmes are turning problems, such as the 'glass ceiling' and taking time off to have children, into positive recruiting aids to attract the best young female scientists.

The glass ceiling meant that of the many women who entered science, few made it to professor and fewer still rose to the top ranks. But those who have broken through are paving the way for others to join them. The appointments of Shirley Tilghman as president of Princeton University and of Susan Hockfield as president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology have served as a wake-up call in the United States. And in Sweden, the Karolinska Institute's new president, Harriet Wallberg-Henriksson, wants to create equal opportunities for women at her institute and in Singapore, where she holds a dual appointment (see www.nature.com/naturejobs/channels/graduate).

But women don't need to be in charge to generate opportunities for other women. Drug and biotechnology firms are creating more flexible working environments, with better daycare facilities, for example (see *Nature Rev. Drug Disc.* **3**, 981; 2004). And a number of organizations are offering 'restart' grants to help women get back into the scientific workforce after taking time off to have children (see *Nature Med.* **10**, 114-115; 2004).

Although such programmes don't cover the majority of opportunities for women, they do represent the vanguard, as they are sponsored by some of the world's leading organizations. Institutions that fail to create better environments for women to work in, and don't offer more opportunities for them to advance, will do so at their peril. They will be guilty of ignoring a huge pool of talent that others now have firmly in their sights.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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